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Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom

By Robert E. Goodin, James Mahmud Rice, Antti Parpo, Lina Eriksson



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A healthy work-life balance has become increasingly important to people trying to cope with the pressures of contemporary society. This trend highlights the fallacy of assessing well-being in terms of finance alone; how much time we have matters just as much as how much money. The authors of this book have developed a novel way to measure 'discretionary time': time which is free to spend as one pleases. Exploring data from the US, Australia, Germany, France, Sweden and Finland, they show that temporal autonomy varies substantially across different countries and under different living conditions. By calibrating how much control people have over their time, and how much they could have under alternative welfare, gender or household arrangements, this book offers a new perspective for comparative cross-national enquiries into the temporal aspects of human welfare.



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Editorial Review

Review

"The conclusion of Discretionary Time...is that most of us have no one but ourselves to blame for our time-scarce predicament. Time pressure, they argue, suggests compulsion. But are we really forced to work so hard, take the kids to hockey, and redo the patio? No: these are our choices. If we see 'free time' as the hour at the end of the day to read the paper once the children are in bed and the chores are done, then we never seem to have enough. But the authors suggest it would be more accurate to measure the amount of time we have left once we have met life's necessities - what they call 'discretionary time.' We could, after all, just work enough to feed ourselves, clothe the kids in hand-me-downs and wash only once a week. We would then have a lot more time on our hands: indeed, around 80 hours a week, or almost 12 hours a day, even accounting for sleep."

Stephen Cave, The Financial Times

"Confronting Marx's capitalist 'realm of necessity' head on, Goodin and his co-authors replace money with time as the measure of freedom and ask: 'how much control do citizens of OECD countries have over their allotments of time?' Don't be intimidated by the numbers and tables - the result is a fresh view of cross-national inequities, replete with new recipes for reform."

Stephan Leibfried Professor of Public Policy, University of Bremen and Head of the Research Center for Transformations of the State

"Only a group of scholars led by Bob Goodin could be sufficiently intellectually daring to replace money with leisure time as the metric of welfare achievement. In an era in which 'time to stand and stare' becomes ever scarcer, this is a book on the impacts of public policy which really matters."

Francis G. Castles Professor of Social and Public Policy, University of Edinburgh

About the Author

Robert E. Goodin is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Social & Political Theory in the Research School of Social Sciences at Australian National University.

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